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### Does more knowledge about the European Union lead to a stronger European identity? A comparative analysis among adolescents in 21 European member states

Soetkin Verhaegen<sup>a</sup> & Marc Hooghe<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Center for Political Science, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Leuven, Belgium

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## **Does more knowledge about the European Union lead to a stronger European identity? A comparative analysis among adolescents in 21 European member states**

Soetkin Verhaegen\* and Marc Hooghe

*Center for Political Science, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Leuven, Belgium*

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Strengthening European identity is often considered as one of the mechanisms to address the perceived lack of legitimacy of the European Union (EU). In this study we test the explanatory power of cognitive mobilization for the development of European identity (more knowledge about the EU leads to a stronger European identity) and we challenge this model by the inclusion of both an economic utilitarian explanation for European identity (benefiting more from EU integration leads to a stronger European identity) and a political trust approach (having more political trust leads to a stronger European identity). The multilevel regression analysis on the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study 2009 data, which is collected among adolescents in 21 member states, shows that knowledge about the EU has a significant but limited effect on European identity. Personal economic benefits because of EU membership and having trust in national political institutions, in contrast, are more important determinants for the development of European identity.

**Keywords:** European identity; European Union; International Civics and Citizenship Education Study 2009; political knowledge; economic utilitarianism; political trust

### **Introduction**

One of the perennial problems of the European Union (EU) is its alleged lack of democratic legitimacy (Hobolt 2012; Scharpf 2009). This lack of legitimacy expresses itself in a low voter turnout for European elections and a prevailing Eurosceptic climate in a number of member states (Leconte 2010). This lack of legitimacy has been related to the fact that European identity is but weakly developed (Habermas 2011). For most inhabitants of the EU, the sense of belonging to a community of European citizens is less than salient, and this also means that EU citizens do not have the feeling that the EU truly represents their common interests. Both in European policy documents and in the academic literature it is often assumed that more and more adequate knowledge about the EU could serve as a mechanism to strengthen European identity. This cognitive mobilization mechanism suggests that a higher level of knowledge about the EU will be associated with higher levels of European identity. As citizens gain more knowledge about the goals and the functioning of the EU, it is assumed that they will identify more strongly with the community of European citizens (Díez Medrano and Gutiérrez 2001; Faas 2007; Inglehart 1970; Philippou, Keating, and Ortloff 2009; Thorpe 2008). It is expected that the more familiar citizens are with the way the EU functions, the closer they

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\*Corresponding author. Email: [Soetkin.verhaegen@soc.kuleuven.be](mailto:Soetkin.verhaegen@soc.kuleuven.be)

will feel related to this level of political decision-making. However, the empirical merits of this hypothesis about the cognitive development of European identity have not yet been investigated in a comprehensive manner among the group that is targeted most frequently by this kind of information: adolescents. Both the EU itself and a variety of school systems devote a considerable amount of resources on targeting adolescents with information about the EU, and one of the goals of this effort is to strengthen the legitimacy of European integration (Keating 2009). Whether this objective is actually realized, therefore, remains to be investigated.

If we want to determine the impact of knowledge on European identity in a methodologically valid manner, it is important to include other possible determinants of identity into the analysis as well. Therefore, in this article two competing theoretical claims will simultaneously be put to the test, in order to assess in a correct manner whether knowledge about the EU contributes to the development of a European identity. More specifically, we also test the economic utilitarian approach and the political trust model. From the theory on economic utilitarianism it is hypothesized that identity will be related to a sense of benefits derived from EU membership. Those that stand to gain from further European integration will develop a stronger sense of European identity than those who actually lose out as a result of the process of European integration (Jiménez et al. 2004; Kritzinger 2005). The political trust model assumes that citizens perceive the EU as an institution that was conceived and is directed mainly by the political elites of the member states (Anderson 1998). Citizens expressing a high level of trust in the political institutions of their own country are, therefore, also more likely to develop a stronger European identity.

We use a large-scale comparative European survey among adolescents to test the potential of these explanations for European identity. We opt for this approach because adolescents are systematically exposed to information about the functioning of the European institutions at school (Philippou, Keating, and Orloff 2009). This implies that among this group that is still enrolled in the school system, we can test the impact of knowledge in an ideal setting as basically the school system decides whether they will be exposed to knowledge about the EU or not. Also, social identity is mainly developed at an early age and crystallizes during mid-adolescence (Meeus et al. 2010). By studying 14-year-old respondents, we study the development of European identity right at the phase in life when this process is taking place.

In this article, we briefly review the literature on cognitive mobilization, economic utilitarianism, and political trust in their relationship with European identity. Subsequently we present data, methods, and the results of the multilevel analysis.

### ***Knowledge and European identity***

First, it is important to define the theoretical concept of European identity. European identity can be conceptualized as the inclusion of the European policy level in the social identity of an individual (Herrmann and Brewer 2004). A social identity consists of different overlapping layers of identification with the social groups one is part of (Tajfel 1981). This concept of social identity implies that one is both conscious about a group membership (cognitive aspect) and that one attaches a positive affective value to this group membership (emotional aspect). For the EU this means that individuals with a sense of European identity are aware that they are part of the group of European citizens (cognitive aspect) and that they attach positive emotional value to this group membership. One can identify with numerous social groups (e.g. based on gender, occupation, religion,

nationality) and all these aspects of one's social identity can be combined. One's national identity can, for instance, intersect or interact with one's European identity and it depends on the specific interaction context which identity is experienced as most salient (Sen 2006; Fligstein 2008; Risse 2010). Numerous authors have stated that the development of a common European identity is crucial to lay the foundations for a fully legitimate and robust democratic EU (Ehin 2008; Føllesdal 2006). Jürgen Habermas (2011) is among the most vocal advocates of the claim that this sense of shared identity is the most important alternative for a bureaucratic and sometimes even undemocratic process of European integration. If the EU wants to evolve toward a truly democratic institution, it needs to represent a European community of citizens and this is only possible when there is a sense of common belonging among all citizens of the EU, which according to Habermas is almost inevitably built on a European identity. Furthermore, recent findings have shown that citizens also attach different meanings to this group membership. A distinction is routinely made between civic and cultural conceptualizations of European identity (Bruter 2003, 2008; Delanty 2002; Fligstein et al. 2012). For citizens who conceptualize European identity as civic form of identity, being a European citizen means to be part of a political community with political institutions, with a system of rights and duties for the individual citizens. A cultural European identity, on the other hand, means sharing a common history, values, and cultural traits among the European citizens. The theory of cognitive mobilization that we will put to the test in this paper, however, does not propose any expectations about the impact of knowledge about the EU on the specific *meaning* attached to European identity. The existing literature only deals with the strength of identity and not with the question whether a civic or a cultural conceptualization is predominant. In the current study we therefore only focus on the *strength* of European identity.

Second, there is a strong ongoing debate about the question whether the transfer of knowledge can lead to a stronger European identity. The EU itself assumes that citizens will feel closer to the European ideals if they receive adequate information about the functioning of the EU institutions (Directorate-General for Communication 2011). In the academic literature, the importance of this cognitive mechanism is also routinely highlighted. Most of the literature departs from Inglehart's theory of cognitive mobilization which argues that citizens who know more about the EU have a stronger European identity because: "One must become aware of it [the European Union] before one can develop a sense of commitment" (Inglehart 1970, 47). Citizens with these cognitive skills are expected to be better capable to deal with a rather distant and abstract community such as the EU. This reasoning would imply that there has to be a cognitive basis for the development of a European identity. Indeed, a defining characteristic of a social identity is that there has to be some level of consciousness about being part of a specific social group. While Inglehart (1970, 56) aimed to learn more about the development of European identity, he however only tested the explanatory power of cognitive mobilization for support for European integration and not for European identity. Most research testing the merits of cognitive mobilization subsequently also focused solely on support for European integration (see e.g. Janssen 1991; Stoeckel 2012). As recent studies tend to distinguish more strictly between measures of support for European integration and European identity (Beaudonnet and Di Mauro 2012; Cram 2012), the few studies concerning European identity which include references to the importance of knowledge about the EU are highly relevant for our current study. Faas (2007) and Thorpe (2008), for instance, found a positive relationship between knowledge about the EU and European identity among adolescents. However, these studies are qualitative

studies based on the experiences of a limited number of adolescents in only one or a few member states. One notable study moving beyond this scope is the work of Juan Díez Medrano and Paula Gutiérrez (2001) who tested the theory of cognitive mobilization for the explanation of European identity using a large-scale (adult) survey in Spain. They confirm that cognitive mobilization explains the strength of European identity of citizens in a similar way as it explains the attitude support for European integration. An important limitation of this study, however, is that cognitive mobilization is operationalized as media use and educational level, while Inglehart already concluded in his article that a test of objective knowledge is the preferred method of operationalization (Inglehart 1970, 54). The current study builds on these insights and aims to validate them by testing the theory of cognitive mobilization among adolescents in a broad sample of member states by using a large-scale quantitative analysis and by using objective knowledge about the EU as a more direct measurement of cognitive mobilization. The International Civic and Citizenship Education Study 2009 (ICCS 2009) data allow for such a large-scale quantitative analysis. Such research allows for the identification of a relationship between knowledge and European identity, where we follow cognitive approaches that assume a causal relationship between knowledge and identity.

The first hypothesis of this article therefore is:

More knowledge about the European Union leads to a stronger European identity.

#### ***Alternative approaches: economic utilitarianism and political trust***

If we want to assess the validity of the cognitive model, however, it is also important to include competing approaches in the analysis. The model of economic utilitarianism departs from self-interest. Actors are assumed to base their judgment and identification with the EU community on a rational cost–benefit calculation about the economic benefits or costs of European membership (Cinnirella 1997; Fligstein, Polyakova, and Sandholtz 2012; Kritzinger 2005; Verhaegen, Hooghe, and Quintelier 2014). In this view, citizens will identify more easily with the EU if the rational cost–benefit analysis they make results in a positive outcome. More precisely, it has been shown that for European identity – in contrast to support for European integration – only perceived economic benefits and objective measures measured on the individual level are important for the explanation of this form of identity (Verhaegen, Hooghe, and Quintelier 2014). This can be understood by the observation that identity also has an emotional element next to a cognitive element, rendering it more personal than the attitudinal variable of support for European integration. The theory of economic utilitarianism will be operationalized in line with these previous results. Moreover, this process of economic utilitarian concerns leading to the development of a European identity follows the neo-functional logic that more intense European cooperation will lead to substantial economic benefits, thus strengthening loyalty to the project of European integration (Haas 1958, 2001). If we want to test the validity of a cognitive development of European identity, it is therefore necessary to also include these economic considerations into the model as a competing explanation for European identity. Consequently, the second hypothesis of this article is that:

Citizens who obtain more economic benefits because of EU membership will develop a stronger European identity.

We also include the level of trust in the national political institutions in the analysis. Political trust is trust in “the core institutions of the state, including the legislature, executive, and judicial branches of government” (Norris 2011, 29). This means that this definition of political trust does not reflect trust in specific office holders at a certain point in time, but it reflects trust in the institutions in general (Zmerli and Hooghe 2011). Only a limited number of studies in the field of the EU have focused on political trust so far (Arnold, Sapir, and Zapryanova 2012).

According to proponents of this model, citizens of the member states identify more strongly as Europeans when they trust their own national political institutions. A citizen who trusts political institutions expects that these institutions will act according to the norms and principles that are prevailing within the community (Anderson 1998; Norris 2011). National political institutions are expected to play a role in the development of European identity because of their function as guardians of the shared norms and values within the community (Kaina 2006). From the definition of European identity as an aspect of one’s social identity, we derive that citizens with a European identity feel part of a political community, the EU. This means that they identify with a wider group of European citizens who are expected to share the same norms and values. As in the large community of EU citizens interaction with a large proportion of fellow citizens is not likely to occur, citizens have to rely on the fact that they are governed by political institutions that have agreed upon a set of shared norms and values they believe in within the larger European society. Therefore, we expect that citizens who trust the national political institutions will develop a stronger European identity. These national institutions engaged their member state in European integration and play an important role in the development of and in guarding the norms and values within the EU community. This proposed mechanism follows a functional reasoning about trust, assuming that trust is built on expectations. These expectations help to reduce the complexity of social interaction and are built on common values and norms. Accordingly, we argue that first a relation of trust needs to be established with the (national) political institutions citizens are familiar with, and subsequently these expectations are transferred to an identification with the European community the political institutions engaged in. As a third hypothesis we therefore state that:

There is a positive relation between trust in national political institutions and the development of a European identity.

## **Data and methods**

The data in this article are derived from the ICCS 2009 that was conducted in 21 member states of the EU (Schulz, Ainley, and Fraillon 2009). The ICCS questionnaire includes extensive information on various topics of citizenship education. The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement conducted the study and national research agencies cooperated within the framework of this international organization to conduct research about educational outcomes. The data were collected in 2009 among 70,502 pupils in 21 European member states with an average age of 14.4.<sup>1</sup> Earlier research has established that at this age political attitudes and preferences can be measured in a valid manner (van Deth, Abendschön, and Vollmar 2011). Meeus et al. (2010) showed that social identities develop at an early age and crystallize during mid-adolescence, so we study the explanatory value of different theoretical approaches at a time when the development of European identity is taking place. The adolescents filled



out a self-administered questionnaire at school and each time the whole class was surveyed. At least 150 schools were selected in each country, using a random sample proportional to school size, with an inclusion of all education tracks. The aim was to question 3000 pupils in each member state. The average response in the countries included in this article was, after replacement, 89.5% and it has to be remembered in this regard that the survey in most countries was conducted by the educational authorities themselves which contributed to the willingness of school principals to participate in the study.

The ICCS data contain sufficient indicators for knowledge about the EU, as well as for European identity, political trust, and economic benefits to investigate the relationship between these variables. As the 70,502 respondents in this study are nested within 21 European member states, we will use a multilevel model with random intercepts that takes individual and country specific information into account.

## **Operationalization**

### ***European identity***

The survey data allow us to operationalize European identity. In line with Tajfel's definition of social identity, Weiler (1997) stated that a European identity is based on "the individual's sentiments of belonging to the Union" (Weiler 1997, 500). It is thus not sufficient that a citizen is aware of belonging to the EU; citizens also have to express a positive emotional attachment to it. We therefore use measures of both cognitive and emotional identification as a European citizen. First, the cognitive element of awareness to belong to the group of European citizens is measured in the data-set as feeling part of the EU. This measure of self-categorization is a common measure for identity (Citrin and Sides 2004; Quintelier and Dejaeghere 2008; Risse 2010). Second, the statement "I am proud to be a member of the EU" measures the emotional dimension of European identity. We measure the positive emotional value attached to being a European citizen as this is in line with social identity theory which argues that *positive* emotional value should be attached to a group membership in order for an individual to include this in one's social identity (Tajfel 1981). We therefore expect that the statements "I am proud to live in Europe," "I feel part of Europe," "I am proud that my country is a member of the European Union," and "I feel part of the EU" from the ICCS 2009 survey will measure European identity in a comprehensive way (Levine and Thompson 2004). The respondents could express their agreement with these statements on a 4-point Likert scale. The principal component analysis (Table 1) shows that this theoretical expectation is also empirically confirmed: all four items clearly load on the same latent factor, so they can be considered as a valid operationalization of European identity (Eigenvalue: 2.536; explained variance: 63.4%). The results of this factor scale will be used as the dependent variable in the analyses.

### ***Cognitive mobilization***

An extensive battery of knowledge questions about the EU (19 questions) was included in the ICCS (Kerr et al. 2009). Typical questions were about the meeting place of the European Parliament, the enlargement of the EU, and European competences. The answers to the multiple-choice questions were binary recoded as answered false or true and a score between 0 and 19 was calculated as a measure for "knowledge about the European Union" (see Appendix 1 for the exact wording of the questions). This cognitive



Table 1. Factor analysis European identity.

	European identity
I am proud to live in Europe	0.797
I feel part of Europe	0.829
I am proud that my country is a member of the EU	0.781
I feel part of the EU	0.779

Note:  $N = 52,478$ . Principal component analysis. Cronbach's  $\alpha$ : 0.806. Eigenvalue: 2.539. Explained variance: 63.5%.

Source: ICCS 2009.

test (Table 2) shows that the knowledge level among the respondents is quite high, with an average score of 12.4 on 19. Respondents from new member states Poland and Slovakia seem to be the best informed, while we measure the lowest score in the English education system. Earlier findings suggested that there is a difference in political knowledge between girls and boys (Hooghe, Quintelier, and Reeskens, 2007; Mondak and Anderson 2004). In this research we find a significant ( $p < 0.001$ ), though small difference between an average score of 12.6 on 19 for boys and 12.3 for girls.

### *Economic utilitarianism*

Following the suggestions made in previous studies about economic utilitarianism in the EU, we include individual-level variables measuring perceived and objective economic

Table 2. Mean score on 19 knowledge questions per member state.

Country	Mean	SD
England	11.03	2.60
Spain	11.16	2.40
Greece	11.87	2.65
Luxembourg	11.93	2.47
Malta	12.08	2.68
Latvia	12.09	2.38
Ireland	12.20	2.58
Cyprus	12.22	2.44
Belgium	12.26	2.32
Slovenia	12.28	2.28
Italy	12.31	2.48
Austria	12.39	2.64
Sweden	12.54	2.63
Finland	12.59	2.37
Estonia	12.77	2.19
Lithuania	12.84	2.38
Bulgaria	12.91	2.43
Czech Republic	12.93	2.20
Denmark	13.05	2.43
Slovakia	13.26	2.59
Poland	13.78	2.37
Total average	12.43	2.53

Note:  $N = 62,112$ . Numbers are mean scores (0–19) and standard deviations (SDs).

Source: ICCS 2009.

Table 3. Factor analysis perceived economic benefits.

	Perceived economic benefits
If all European countries had the same currency, they would be economically stronger.	0.786
There are more advantages to joining a common currency, such as the Euro, than there are disadvantages.	0.803
All countries in Europe should join the Euro.	0.818

Note:  $N = 52,478$ . Principal component analysis. Cronbach's  $\alpha$ : 0.720. Eigenvalue: 1.931. Explained variance: 64.4%. Response options: strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), agree (3), and strongly agree (4). Source: ICCS 2009.

benefits (Verhaegen, Hooghe, and Quintelier 2014). To measure perceived economic benefits of European integration, the ICCS 2009 data-set includes three statements about the economic merits of financial integration. These three survey items load on one underlying factor: perceived economic benefits. The principal component factor analysis is presented in Table 3. The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.720 indicates that these items form a reliable and internally consistent scale.

The expected educational level of the adolescent can be used as a proxy for objective economic benefits, because citizens with a higher educational level tend to benefit more from economic integration (Loveless and Rohrschneider 2011; Serricchio, Tsakatika, and Quaglia 2013). As the respondents are still enrolled in secondary school, we do not know what the final educational level of the respondents will be. However, the survey did probe about the educational level the respondents expected to reach in the future. Response options were lower secondary school, upper secondary school, nontertiary post-secondary or vocational tertiary education, and having finished theoretically oriented tertiary studies or a postgraduate degree. Previous research has shown that the expected educational level of adolescents is widely applied as a proxy indicator for academic orientation (Andrew and Hauser 2012).

**Political trust**

In the ICCS 2009 national political trust was measured as trust in local and national political institutions. The question posed for the four institutions in Table 4 was: "How much do you trust each of the following institutions?" The response options were: "completely," "quite a lot," "a little," and "not at all." The principal component analysis shows that trust in political institutions forms one latent concept (Hooghe 2011). The

Table 4. Factor analysis for trust in political institutions.

	Trust in political institutions
Trust in national government	0.829
Trust in local government	0.724
Trust in political parties	0.817
Trust in national parliament	0.839

Note:  $N = 52,478$ . Cronbach's  $\alpha$ : 0.817. Principal component analysis. Eigenvalue: 2.582. Explained variance: 64.6%. Source: ICCS 2009.

Table 5. Factor analysis political interest.

	Political interest
Interest in political issues in community	0.773
Interest in political issues in country	0.862
Interest in social issues in country	0.796
Interest in politics in other countries	0.785
Interest in international politics	0.815

Note:  $N = 52,478$ . Principal component analysis. Cronbach's  $\alpha$ : 0.866. Eigenvalue: 3.256. Explained variance: 65.1%.

Source: ICCS 2009.

Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.817 demonstrates that these items are a reliable measure for trust in political institutions.

### **Control variables**

Furthermore, in the model we include a number of control variables, both at the individual level and at the country level. At the individual level, we first control for the expectation of a strong correlation between political interest, socioeconomic status, and political knowledge (Eveland and Scheufele 2000). Politically interested adolescents are more likely to acquire knowledge about the EU (Prior 2010). To measure political interest, we use the factor scale presented in Table 5.<sup>2</sup> The items, measured by a 4-point Likert scale, probed about the interest of the respondents in a wide range of political and social issues. The factor analysis shows that these items form a highly reliable indicator for interest in political and social problems (Eigenvalue: 3.257; explained variance: 65.1%; Cronbach's  $\alpha$ : 0.866). In general, we can expect that socioeconomic status will be strongly related to knowledge, and this also holds for knowledge about the EU (Faas 2007; Thorpe 2008; Agirdag, Huyst, and Van Houtte 2012). Respondents were also asked about the educational level of their parents. The variables "educational level of the father" and "educational level of the mother" correlated strongly (Pearson's correlation = 0.581), so we combined both measurements in a sum scale. This variable taps into the socioeconomic status of the family in which the adolescent grows up.

Other commonly used control variables in this field are age, gender, and origin. We cannot take up age as a variable since respondents were selected on the class level, and thus all have more or less the same age. The variable gender is adopted in the data-set as a binary variable, with boys coded as 0 and girls as 1. Adolescents born outside the EU are expected to have a weaker European identity than adolescents born inside the EU (Agirdag, Huyst, and Van Houtte 2012). The ICCS data, however, do not allow making this distinction as the survey did not ask about the specific country of birth. Pupils were only asked whether they and their parents were born in the country where they were surveyed. Using this information we can divide the respondents into three groups: native citizens, immigrants (who were not born in the country where they were surveyed), and second-generation citizens (who were born in the country where they were surveyed but that have at least one parent that was not born in this country). These groups are included in the analysis as dummy variables with native citizens as the reference category.

On the country level, we control for the moment of accession to the EU of the member state and for the aggregated level of Euroscepticism. Since some previous studies observed different levels of European identity in older and newer member states, we

control for the moment of accession of each member state. Risse (2010) concluded that European identification in the newer member states from Central and Eastern Europe is lower than in the older member states because length of EU membership matters in the development of a European identity. Although there is no linear relation between how long a country has been a member state and the strength of European identification, citizens of new member states tend to feel less European according to this study. In line with previous research, we split up the member states into three categories to test this relationship (Gabel 1998; L. Hooghe and Marks 2005; Risse 2010). The founding members (Treaty of Rome in 1957) serve as the reference category, with a second group that joined the EU between 1973 and 1995 and a third group that joined between 2004 and 2007.<sup>3</sup> Finally, we control for the level of Euroscepticism within each member state. Faas (2007) found that the relationship between knowledge and European identity might vary, depending on the dominant framing of the EU within the public opinion of a member state. Accordingly, we include an aggregate measure of Euroscepticism based on the question in Eurobarometer 72.4 (2009) whether respondents perceive the EU membership of their country as “a good thing,” “neither a good nor a bad thing,” or “a bad thing” in order to assess in a more general manner the prevailing attitude toward Europe. In the construction of our scale we attributed the value 0 to the answer that membership is “a good thing,” 0.5 to “neither a good nor a bad thing,” and 1 to “a bad thing” (Lubbers and Scheepers 2005). By multiplying these values with the proportion of respondents in each member state that chose this response option and adding them, we obtained an aggregated measurement for the mean level of Euroscepticism in each member state. Descriptives of all included variables are presented in [Appendix 2](#).

## Results

Given that our dependent variable “European identity” is continuous, we can run a linear regression with independent variables on two levels. Adolescents ( $N = 52,478$ ) are nested in member states ( $N = 21$ ), so we built a two-level multilevel model with random intercepts to account for the clustering (Hox 2010). The analysis was carried out in two steps. In Model 1 we only take the explanatory variables to test the cognitive, economic utilitarian, and trust approach into account. The control variables both at the individual level and at the country level are added in Model 2.

When we run the null model ([Table 6](#)) we can observe that a significant proportion of variance in European identity is situated at the country level. The intra-cluster correlation (ICC) is 5.1%. The likelihood-ratio test shows that the inclusion of the country level is a significant improvement to the model in comparison to a single-level regression model. The variance located at this level indicates that levels of European identity are to some extent clustered within member states. [Figure 1](#) visualizes this spread in the average level of European identity. It is therefore necessary to include country-level variables.

Model 1 shows the multilevel model with the explanatory variables only. First, we take a look at the overall impact of the inclusion of these variables. The log-likelihood drops from the null model to Model 1, showing that the inclusion of these variables is an improvement for the model fit. The explanatory variables also explain an important proportion of the variance in European identity between adolescents as the unexplained variance  $e(ij)$  drops from 0.914 to 0.801. We use the “approximate  $R^2$ ” as calculated in Hox (2010) as a measure for explained variance. The included variables in Model 1 explain 12.3% of the individual-level variance. Second, we look at the explanatory variables. As we aim to compare the importance of each theoretical explanation for the

Table 6. Multilevel Regression model for European identity.

	Null model			Model 1: explanatory variables			Model 2: full model		
	B	SE	$\beta$	B	SE	$\beta$	B	SE	$\beta$
Intercept	0.031	0.049	0.009	−0.260***	0.044	0.008	0.165	0.116	0.085
EU knowledge				0.016***	0.002	0.040***	0.011***	0.002	0.027***
Perceived economic benefits				0.236***	0.004	0.239***	0.231***	0.004	0.234***
Expected educational level				0.030***	0.004	0.030***	0.023***	0.004	0.024***
Political trust				0.227***	0.004	0.230***	0.203***	0.004	0.205***
Gender (female = 1)							−0.042***	0.008	−0.042***
Political interest							0.083***	0.004	0.084***
Parental education							0.003	0.004	0.003
Origin (ref. native)									
Second generation							−0.085***	0.012	−0.086***
Immigrant							−0.174***	0.018	−0.176***
<i>Country variables</i>									
Accession (ref. 1957)									
Accessed 1973–1995							−0.003	0.101	−0.003
Accessed 2004–2007							−0.055	0.099	−0.055
Euroskepticism							−0.934**	0.334	−0.089**
$e(ij)$	0.914	0.006	0.936	0.801	0.005	0.821	0.793	0.005	0.813
$u(0j)$	0.050	0.015	0.051	0.031	0.010	0.031	0.021	0.006	0.021
ICC	5.1%		5.1%	3.7%		3.7%	2.5%		2.5%
LL	−72153		−72787	−68693		−69327	−68431		−69064
$R^2$ (individual level)				12.3%			13.2%		

Note:  $N$  (individual level) = 52,478;  $n$  (country level) = 21 for all models, after listwise deletion. Standardized  $\beta$  coefficients are calculated for all variables, except for dummy variables.

\*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

Source: ICCS 2009.

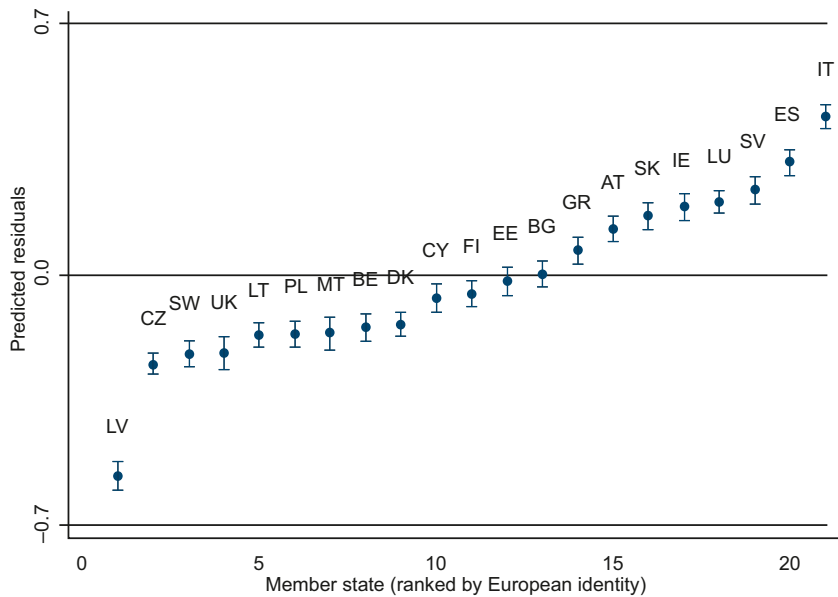


Figure 1. Country residuals and 95% confidence intervals for European identity in the null model. Note:  $N = 53,886$ . Source: ICCS 2009.

development of a European identity, standardized  $\beta$  coefficients are presented in Table 6 so that we can compare the strength of the relationships. The main explanatory variable knowledge about the EU is significantly ( $p < 0.001$ ) positively related to European identity. We see that although it is significant, the  $\beta$  coefficient of EU knowledge is rather limited ( $\beta = 0.040$ ). The analysis shows that knowing more about the EU and having a stronger European identity are related, but this is a rather weak relationship. The two indicators for the economic utilitarian approach are significantly positively related to European identity as well, as expected. The more adolescents perceive that it is economically beneficial for member states to join the Eurozone, the stronger their European identity is. Also a higher expected education outcome is positively related to European identity. Especially the effect of perceived economic benefits on European identity is very strong ( $\beta = 0.239$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), as compared to the effect of knowledge about the EU. The economic utilitarian approach is thus a much better explanation for European identity than cognitive mobilization. The trust model as well shows a strong positive relationship with European identity ( $\beta = 0.230$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). The more one has trust in national political institutions, the more one identifies as European. Thus, the political trust approach receives much more support than the cognitive approach as well.

Among the control variables, we find a few variables that are strongly related to European identity. The control variables are included in Model 2. As expected, we see a drop in unexplained variance at both the individual level and the country level again. The stepwise inclusion (not shown in the models) of individual-level control variables in a first step and country-level variables in a second step shows that the drop in unexplained variance at the country level from 0.031 to 0.021 is indeed caused by the inclusion of the country-level controls. The drop in unexplained variance at the individual level is caused by the inclusion of individual-level controls. The inclusion of these control variables in the analysis causes only small decreases in the coefficients of the explanatory variables as

compared to Model 1. The found relationships are thus robust. Except for the moment of accession and the parental education which are not significant, all control variables behave as expected. For the individual controls we see that girls have a slightly weaker European identity than boys, adolescents that are more interested in political and social matters tend to feel more European and non-native adolescents tend to have a weaker European identity. The effect is stronger for adolescents that have experienced migrating to a different country themselves, in comparison to adolescents that are second-generation immigrants. The country-level control variable Euroscepticism shows that adolescents that grow up in a member state where citizens are more Eurosceptic than average feel less European than their counterparts in more pro-European member states.

Finally, we decided not to include random coefficients in the model since our research question and theoretical assumptions do not require these tests. To assess the robustness of the results, we did check for the variance (random coefficients) between member states for the relation between knowledge about the EU and European identity. However, the variance (0.3%) was not of substantive magnitude.

## Discussion

The analyses show that all three theories tested can explain part of the development of a stronger European identity among adolescents. All three hypotheses are thus confirmed, but these results need some qualification. When testing the cognitive mobilization model with a comprehensive measure of objective knowledge about the EU and a comprehensive measurement of strength of European identity, we see that cognitive mobilization does not add substantively to the development of European identity. The economic utilitarian and political trust model are much better at explaining different levels of European identity. These findings provide more clarity in how to understand the merits of the theory of cognitive mobilization on the one hand, and in the relative importance of the cognitive mobilization theory, economic utilitarian model and political trust model in explaining strength of European identity on the other hand.

Our analyses oppose different previous studies on cognitive mobilization that do find strong explanatory power for this theory. This can be explained by the different operationalization used for cognitive mobilization on the one hand, and by the use of different dependent variables on the other hand. The study of Díez Medrano and Guittierrez (2001) on European identity, for instance, found strong support for the theory of cognitive mobilization. This study, however, operationalized cognitive mobilization not as objective knowledge, but as reading international news in newspapers. This operationalization rather measures political interest than knowledge about the EU. Political interest is a control variable in our analysis and this variable indeed shows a similar result as in the study of Díez Medrano and Guittierrez (2001). When Inglehart (1970, 54) proposed his theory, however, he called for the operationalization of cognitive mobilization as objective knowledge about the EU, so we included such a measurement in our analyses.

When testing the theory of cognitive mobilization, many studies have used support for European integration as a dependent variable, instead of European identity as the theory intended to explain (Inglehart 1970, 56). The study of Stoeckel (2012), for instance, does use objective knowledge to operationalize cognitive mobilization, but it uses support for European integration as a dependent variable. Combining the results of Stoeckel and of our own analyses, we thus can conclude that cognitive mobilization – measured as objective knowledge about the EU – stimulates support for European integration, but it only weakly stimulates the development of a European identity. This



shows that while support for European integration and European identity are closely related, they cannot be treated as the same concept (Beaudoonnet and Di Mauro 2012; Cinnirella 1997; Cram 2012). This is an important finding as often the cognitive mobilization theory intended to explain European identity is tested using support for European integration as a dependent variable. A reason for this difference could be found in the fact that support for European integration is an attitude, while European identity is an aspect of one's social identity. The latter concept also has an emotional aspect, in addition to the cognitive aspect of being conscious about one's group membership. It might be speculated that cognitive mobilization taps into the cognitive aspect of European identity, but not into the emotional aspect.

Furthermore, we found that economic utilitarianism and the political trust model each can explain a relevant part of the puzzle on the development of European identity. The hypothesis that knowledge about the EU leads to a stronger European identity, to the contrary, is only weakly confirmed as the relationship between knowledge about the EU and European identity is rather weak. A much stronger relationship exists between the economic indicators and political trust on the one hand and European identity on the other hand. The more adolescents trust their national political institutions that initiated the integration of their country into the EU, the more strongly they also feel attached to this European community. The highest coefficient is found for perceived economic benefits, which is significantly higher than the coefficient for national political trust. We can thus conclude from the current test that European identity can be explained by the alternative models of national political trust and economic benefits. In comparison to the economic utilitarian and the trust approach, the effect of cognitive mobilization remains very limited.

Additionally, the country-level control variable Euroscepticism highlights the importance of the general climate in a member state toward European integration. We find that adolescents that grow up in a member state with a more Eurosceptic climate tend to develop a weaker European identity than when the climate is more in favor of European integration. The moment of accession to the EU is not significant on the country level. These results indicate that it is the attitudinal context that influences the development of the European identity of adolescents, rather than objective indicators of membership. The inclusion of this variable even explains 32.3% of the variation in European identity among adolescents across member states, so this is an important factor to take into account.

Finally, a number of consequences can be derived from these findings. First, more knowledge about the functioning of the European institutions only has a limited effect on European identity. This means that the possibility to strengthen European identity by a direct transmission of knowledge is limited. If European institutions hope to broaden the feeling of belonging to the EU by strengthening knowledge about the EU, this analysis only partly supports this method and most likely effects will be small. While information on Europe of course is important, one can doubt whether providing information by itself is a useful way to strengthen European identity in a substantive manner.

Second, having trust in national political institutions is an important explanation for the development of a stronger European identity. As this relationship between national political trust and European identity is so strong, it is quite surprising that there has been little theoretical and empirical research on the relation between political trust and (European) identity so far. This is thus an important field for further research.

Third, this study might inform us about the question whether the current economic downturn in Europe could have an impact on the strength of European identity developed among young European citizens. Media coverage on the euro crisis might have increased

salience of the EU in media and society which might have strengthened the knowledge adolescents have about the EU, but this also led to more negative attitudes toward the process of European integration. Coinciding with the euro crisis, the climate in which adolescents grow up has become more Eurosceptic and adolescents are likely to perceive membership of the Eurozone as less beneficial. This could be reflected in a weaker development of European identity than at economically more prosperous moments in the EU integration process.

To summarize these implications, we see that while knowledge about the EU can be targeted by school programs and information campaigns, citizens' trust in political institutions should be stimulated and citizens should be persuaded about the economic utility they and their member state enjoy as a result of European integration. However, the latter strategies are much more difficult to implement than providing information about the EU, and the sobering conclusion therefore has to be that there might not be an easy short cut to strengthen levels of European identity among the population of the European member states.

## Notes

1. The research was carried out in Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, UK, Spain, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Latvia, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia and Sweden. It is important to remark that the national educational authorities were responsible for financing this research. More precisely this meant for Belgium that only the Dutch language community participated. The French-speaking community did not allocate financial resources to participate. In the UK only England participated, not Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. The Netherlands originally did take part in the study, but the Dutch research team failed to meet the necessary response rate and therefore the Dutch data are not included in the data-set and the current analysis.
2. Hooghe and Dassonneville (2011) also included variables that measure how often adolescents watch or listen to the news broadcast and talk about politics. There appeared to be multicollinearity between these variables and the variable interest in our model. We keep the variable interest in our model because this measures more directly respondents' interest than when we measure interest more indirectly by looking at media use.
3. The original member states that are included in our sample are Belgium, Luxembourg, and Italy. Between 1973 and 1995 are Austria, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Spain, Sweden, and England that accessed. The new member states in our sample are Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

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## Appendix 1. Used knowledge questions from the ICCS 2009 survey

### *Knowledge about the European Union and its institutions*

Are these statements true or false?

- <country of test> is a member of the European Union
- The European Union is an economic and political partnership between countries
- People get new political rights when their country joins the European Union

How many countries are member states of the European Union?

- 1–10
- 11–20
- 21–30
- 31–40

What is the flag of the European Union?



Which of the following cities is a meeting place for the European Parliament?

- Rome
- Berlin
- Paris
- Brussels

Here are some statements about the possible enlargement of the European Union (i.e. the possibility of more countries joining the European Union). Which of the following statement is true?

- The European Union has decided not to accept any more countries as new members
- The European Union may accept more countries in the future but there are currently no countries being considered as candidates for membership
- The European Union may accept more member countries in the future and is currently considering granting membership to some specific countries
- The European Union has decided to only accept new member countries if any existing member countries decide to leave the European Union

The European Union collects money from member countries to spend on projects. What determines how much each member country contributes to the European Union?

- The five richest European Union countries contribute all the money
- All European Union countries contribute the same amount of money
- All European Union countries contribute, but the amount depends on how rich they are
- Each country chooses how much to contribute based on how well they think the European Union has been using the money

What is one requirement for a country to be allowed to join the European Union?

- The European Union considers it to be a republic
- The European Union considers it to be democratic
- It must be a member of the United Nations <UN>
- It must have a written constitution

Who votes to elect Members of the European Parliament (MEPs)?

- National governments of European Union countries
- Citizens in each European Union country
- Heads of State of European Union countries <(presidents, kings, queens, etc.)>
- The European Commission <(EC)>

*Knowledge about European laws and policies*

Are these statements true or false?

- The European Union decides what is taught in your school about the European Union
- The European Union aims to promote peace, prosperity, and freedom within its borders
- All European Union countries have signed the European Convention on Human Rights
- The European Union has made laws to reduce pollution
- The European Union pays money to farmers in European Union countries to use environmentally friendly farming methods

What can all citizens of the European Union do by law?

- Study in any European Union country without needing a special permit
- Travel to any European Union country without needing to carry any identity documents with them
- Work in any European Union country without needing a special permit
- Vote in the national elections of any European Union country

Are these statements true or false?

- The Euro is the official currency of all countries in Europe
- The Euro is the official currency in European Union countries
- Euro banknotes have the same design in every country where it is the official currency.

**Appendix 2.** Descriptives

Variable	Mean	Minimum	Maximum
European identity	3.068	1	4
Perceived economic benefits	2.951	1	4
Expected educational level	3.095	0	4
Political trust	2.517	1	4
Political interest	2.310	1	5
Parental education	3.431	0	5
Euroscepticism	0.29	0.14	0.52
Variable	Proportion		
Gender	Male: 48.97%		
	Female: 51.03%		
Origin	Native: 81.57%		
	Second generation: 13.05%		
	Immigrant: 5.39%		

Source: ICCS 2009.